

April 13, 2021

TO: The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chair, House Finance Committee

Members, House Finance Committee

STATEMENT OF MAUREEN MAIGRET RE: H6122, Article 16

I Chair the Aging in Community Subcommittee of the Long Term Care Coordinating Council which prepared a comprehensive plan to promote the ability of our older adults to remain living in their own homes and communities. Affordable and accessible housing options are essential for older persons to live safely at home where the vast majority prefer to remain. I also serve on the current Housing Resources Commission as a representative of advocates for senior housing. I was pleased the Commission's regulations for the state Building Homes RI bond program include the elderly as one of the "Special Needs" populations (along with homeless and disabled) for allocating at least 30 percent of the funding to benefit those with special needs. I hope these provisions continue as the recent voter approved \$65Mil housing bond program is implemented

Article 16 contains a number of important features to address the state's significant housing needs which I support – creation of a Division of Housing and Community Development within the Executive branch, appointment of a state Housing Commissioner who will serve in the Office of Commerce as Deputy Secretary of housing and homelessness, more frequent updating of a comprehensive state strategic housing plan and, most critical, creation of a permanent dedicated source of Housing Production Fund from a portion of an increase in the real estate conveyance tax on home sales over \$700,000.

Rhode Island is the only New England state without such funding!

With the third oldest housing stock in the country, much of our housing requires high expenses for maintenance and modification to meet the needs of our older population. The majority of our housing stock was built without accessibility features making them problematic for those with mobility disabilities that often come with age.

The lack of affordable, accessible units leaves older households with few choices if they wish to downsize in their own communities. Lack of state investment in affordable housing development limits housing options for those on fixed incomes as is the case for many older households. Income disparity is growing among older households and the cost of living keeps rising but income remains essentially stagnant.

One out of three older R.I.ers have income less than \$25,000!

Half of R.I. older renters are housing cost burdened paying 30 percent or more of their income on housing costs as are 35 percent of older home owners.

The Rhode Island population is growing older. Soon persons age 65 and over will comprise 20 percent of our population. Covid 19 had a dramatic impact on our older population living in congregate settings and efforts are proposed to help more older persons remain living at home. To do so, we need to ensure affordable and accessible housing options are available. I encourage you as you review Article 16 to continue to support language that takes into consideration the housing needs of older Rhode Islanders.